

EXHIBIT H

[Enlarge image](#)[Affected Hanna: Pure anger](#)[Photo: Franziska Gilli / DER SPIEGEL](#)

Previously unknown facts about the online portal xHamster

The porn empire and its kings

With semi-legal content, the video platform xHamster has become one of the largest websites in the world. And managed to disguise his backers until the very end. That is now over.

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15.10.2021, 13.00 • from DER [SPIEGEL 42/2021](#)

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When Hanna learned about two years ago that more than 100,000 people had seen her naked body, she felt no shame. She did not feel at the mercy, not defenseless, not violated in her dignity. At first, as she tells it today, she felt nothing but sheer anger. »I thought: what an impudence that something like this is possible in Germany today.« A friend had sent her the clip, it is a few minutes long and shows the now 30-year-old and her sister showering in a Göttingen sauna area. Apparently, a guest had hidden a camera under his towel and secretly recorded everything he saw. Months later, the user uploaded the material to the Internet.

On xHamster, the portal that the voyeur chose for his mission, there are hundreds to thousands of such videos. Again and again they show women who were obviously filmed and photographed against their will, with hidden mini cameras, in places not accessible to the public. It is tolerated crime: xHamster is the most visited site in Germany and a giant in the business with bare skin. The portal would actually be obliged to proactively delete such sexual assaults from its offer. This is also stated in the terms and conditions. Instead, they seem to be part of the business.

Hanna also had to realize this when she was looking for other affected people. She searched the perpetrator's account with forensic accuracy, compared the towel and camera angle, the interior design and decoration depicted – and finally found seven more videos, recorded in the same spa facility, sometimes even on the same day. With her findings, she went to the police, filed a complaint and received a little edifying information: She was not the first to take legal action against the account, and a complaint had already been made without success. And: To ensure that the videos are deleted, she must contact xHamster herself. Otherwise, there is not much to do.

xHamster may be one of the largest sites in the world, but no one knows for sure who is responsible for their content. Also where the money that is earned from the distribution of the videos goes. In the grey area of online pornography, the portal is thus a particularly black sheep. While Mindgeek, the biggest competitor and owner of numerous brands such as Pornhub, Redtube and Brazzers, had to disclose its majority owner after a long period of secrecy, xHamster still conceals its masterminds to this day. The game of hide-and-seek makes it almost impossible to control the platform, very few injured parties know who to turn to if their own body is suddenly exhibited worldwide. Unlike the competition, which deleted millions of videos for which it is not possible to say for sure whether they were created by mutual agreement or were published, xHamster continues to earn money with such material.

A team from SPIEGEL and the [reportage format STRG F](#), which NDR produces for funk, has now located informants from the environment of the website, talked to those affected and evaluated hundreds of company papers, social media profiles and online databases. (Watch STRG_F's broadcast [here](#).) The research proves how xHamster hid his backers for years, led public authorities by the nose and drove his rise with dubious means. And they suggest who is actually behind the portal.

The origins of xHamster go back more than 14 years, to the early days of online pornography. In April 2007, a sparse portal with a clear message goes online: »Just porn, no bullshit«. At first, the site is registered anonymously, shortly afterwards a man is registered as the owner, with a Moscow address in an inconspicuous, gray

apartment block. As in many stores that operate on the edge of legality, in the industry you like to use a pseudonym to disguise your identity. In the case of the xHamster founder, there are two. The Russian operates as »Oleg Popov«, it is the name of a now deceased circus clown, famous as a masterful tightrope walker and juggler. In his e-mail address, the clown gives himself a second, more enigmatic name: Tigus.

Tigus is very active in the founding years, dozens of websites can be traced back to the Muscovites, many of them with dubious content. One portal specializes in voyeuristic beach photos, another in sex between old and very young men. A website shows rape videos. In the »Wayback Machine«, a kind of archive of the publicly accessible Internet, it is still possible to understand with which videos and pictures Tigus celebrated his first successes in the early 2000s: sex under threat of violence, with knives on throats and handcuffed victims. How much of it is real and how much is realistically recreated can hardly be determined more than a decade later. It is a legal balancing act that Tigus consciously gets involved in.

At least one other website registered by him has now been deleted from the usual archives, apparently for legal reasons: It is said to have shown pictures of children or young people or linked to them. In any case, it ended up on a blacklist for child pornography in Finland, which the police regularly create for the providers. It is an early testimony that Tigus has little scruples about publishing cruel content.

If you are looking for the beginnings of xHamster today, you should not know anything about all this. Instead, a supposed spokesman for the portal spreads a washed-out story of the foundation in reports and interviews. A fairy tale of two friends who, in view of the increasing popularity of social media, decided to found a »community«. A kind of Facebook for like-minded people, half sex portal, half dating – with a tongue-in-cheek name. The hamster is a cute, sexually very active animal, which finds almost infinite space in its cheeks. Perfect for a site that celebrates itself for its rich offerings.

The man who carries these friendly messages into the world calls himself Alex Hawkins or Hawk for short. In numerous media, he is presented and quoted as Vice President of xHamster, and SPIEGEL has already let Hawkins have his say. But there are no photos or videos of him on the Internet, he usually conducts interviews in writing. This is no wonder: Because there is obviously no Alex Hawkins, according to research by SPIEGEL and STRG_F, the alleged vice president also uses a pseudonym, apparently for many years. The first person to register in the xHamster community will have the name Tigus in their email address. The user who registered the second profile is called Hawkins.

Are the true founders of xHamster behind the two artificial names? And what role do they play today?

Limassol, a bustling city on the south coast of Cyprus, with its long sandy beaches and magnificent old town, could be an insider tip for Europe's tourists. Instead, it is primarily a safe haven for Russian money. In the supermarkets there is plenty of vodka and caviar. White apartment palaces are being built along the coast, and brochures are reminiscent of the now suspended »Cyprus Investment Programme«, which promised EU citizenship for a real estate purchase or a company investment of around two million euros. In the second largest city on the island, tax evaders from [Moscow](#) are hardly asked questions, the business with letterbox companies and offshore accounts is flourishing. Here, in Limassol, xHamster has its official headquarters.



[Enlarge image](#)

Port city of Limassol in the tax haven of Cyprus

Photo: Kirill Makarov / Shutterstock

When sufferers like Hanna want to complain that they can be seen on secretly recorded videos, they end up with a company called Hammy Media via an opaque contact form. In the Terms of Use, the company acts as the sole operator of xHamster.com, there are apparently no connections to parent companies, corporations or Russian investors. The managing director and owner of Hammy Media is Mardiros H., an apparently busy Cypriot. Business registers identify him as the head of numerous companies on the island.

Whoever rings the bell at his modest house is facing a man in shorts and a T-shirt. Although he is a "director of a company", he is at the same time "retired", as he says. How did you find your house in the first place? Then he reaches for the mobile phone, he has to talk briefly with his boss. A few seconds later, he declares that he does not want to talk to journalists – "sorry".

The assumption is that Mardiros H. is a straw man who holds his head for the actual makers of xHamster when there is trouble. Evidence of this can be found in Hammy Media's annual reports. From 2009 to 2018, the company is said to have made a meager profit of a total of 778,443 dollars, several times it fell into the red. A ridiculous performance for one of the largest portals in the world. But if the money doesn't end up with Mardiros H., where then?

In the middle of the research on the company meshes in [Cyprus](#), xHamster himself suddenly speaks up. Through a PR manager from [Bremen](#), the company offers an exclusive interview with the alleged head of the platform. The person introduces himself under the name Oleg R. and answers questions exclusively in writing, but very detailed and friendly. He is afraid that his house could be burned down, he says, only because of the secrecy – apart from that, the man has a lot of conversation.

The reason for this may be in North Rhine-Westphalia, at the Landesanstalt für Medien (LfM), which takes care of child and youth protection on the Internet. Their director Tobias Schmid has been threatening large sites such as xHamster with a ban in Germany for months because they insufficiently control their users for the age of majority. None of the pages has implemented much more than a simple button («I'm 18 or older»). » Even a moderately talented chimpanzee could click away," says Schmid.

Several providers, including the Pornhub operator Mindgeek, are suing the Düsseldorf Administrative Court against a threatened ban. xHamster does not complain, but instead tries to polish up its media image. 30 presenters now took care of screening revenge and involuntary video recordings, writes Oleg R. The verification processes have also been greatly improved. In e-mails, he complains about how unfair the actions of the German authorities are to punish individual large portals instead of the entire industry. One likes to enter into a "dialogue" with the Landesanstalt about this.

The reality is different. So far, all letters from the LfM to xHamster and its provider have remained unanswered, a fine has not been paid. Hardly anything can be achieved officially. Like all public authorities, the Landesanstalt für Medien does not know the people who are really responsible for xHamster and Hammy Media.

The whole realm is suddenly open. And with him his kings.

A trail to the backers of the site leads to a tax haven that is even more opaque than the coastal city of Limassol: the British Virgin Islands. Parts of the xHamster universe that can make a lot of money – a paid premium segment, for example, a segment for live cams that made a turnover of 66 million dollars in 2018 – are managed by their own companies. Its parent company, in turn, is based in the [Caribbean](#). Even with the help of various commercial registers, it is not possible to trace who their owner is. In the tax haven, letterbox companies do not have to list owners. Perfect conditions for publicity-shy companies like xHamster.



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Entrepreneur Netepenko, excerpt from a photo deleted from Instagram

The fact that it is still possible to unmask them is due to a detail that has little to do with tax havens in the Caribbean – but much with the millions that flow there. On its website, xHamster provides advertising space, traditionally a major revenue generator in the industry. The company that manages and sells them is owned by an IT company in Limassol, Cyprus. Its name: Wisebits.

Wisebits is an amazingly perfect façade: In websites, job advertisements and presentations, nothing indicates that the company could be behind the portal. No excited hamster adorns the company logo, but a wise owl, new employees are recruited with videos of sandy beaches and yachts. Wisebits promises them "regular parties" and "unlimited snacks." In fact, she primarily expects the business with bare skin.



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Mardiros H., alleged bogus director of xHamster

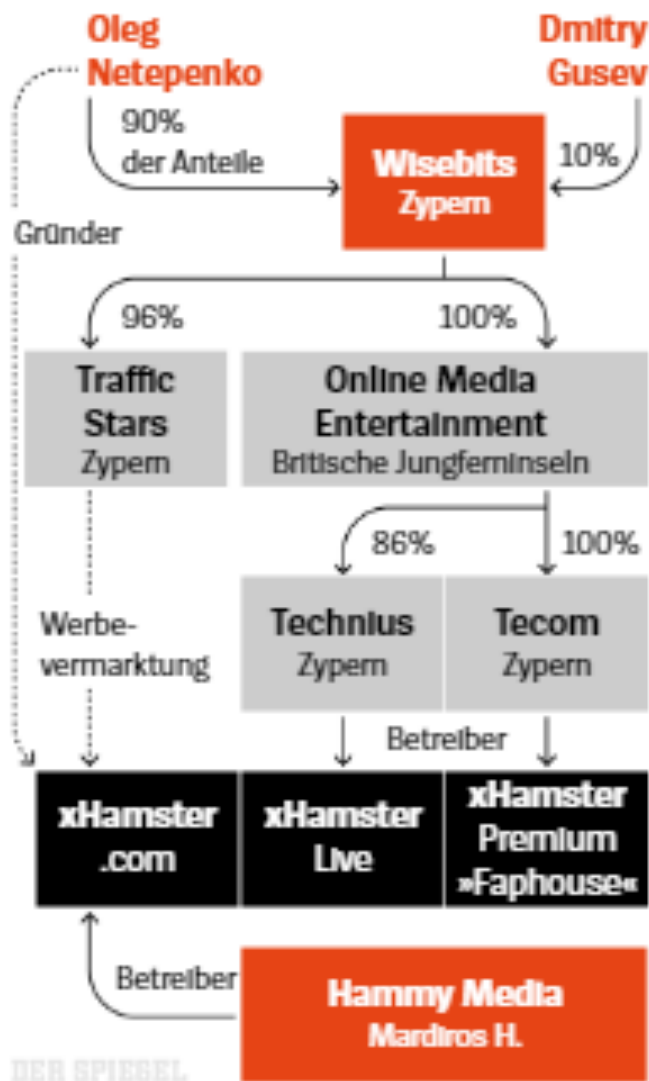
Photo: NDR

Wisebits is the place where all the threads converge, apparently the core of the empire. The premium portal advertised on xHamster, the livecams, the anonymous Caribbean letterbox company reappear in official documents as a subsidiary of Wisebits, plus a company in Antigua, which holds all trademark rights to xHamster. At least one of the companies has a money laundering report, triggered by a transfer to the British Virgin Islands. The whole realm is suddenly open. And with him his kings.

Because behind Wisebits are two Russian names. Dmitry Gusev, a former horror film producer who repeatedly opened accounts under the hawkins name. And Oleg Netepenko, with 90 percent majority owner of Wisebits and thus the main profiteer of the empire. According to research by SPIEGEL and STRG_F, they are the founders of xHamster. And they still have control over the corporate network to this day.

Verschachteltes Porno-Imperium

Die Hintermänner bei xHamster



Netepenko himself uses the pseudonym Tigus in his own company, as employees report. Also in documents of Wirecard, one of the banks of xHamster, Tigus appears as an official contact to the portal. And in the Moscow apartment building, from which numerous other pages were registered for the first time in addition to xHamster, Netepenko's father still lives. Like many of his companies, the entrepreneur himself now resides in Cyprus. Since 2017, he has been the proud holder of a golden EU visa and lives with his wife and children in a chic apartment complex right on the beach of Limassol. Meanwhile deleted photos from social media show a sled man with red hair, playing tennis and at vernissages of his wife. He does not respond to interview requests.

When SPIEGEL and STRG_F confront Netepenko and his many affiliated companies with this research, the realm of the alleged king is suddenly bustling with activity. A social media profile of Netepenko's father disappears from the net. An xHamster

account, which over the years apparently published stolen pictures and videos of young women, is suddenly deleted.

- [**Watch the complete broadcast of the reportage format STRG F**](#)

And the alleged CEO, who previously chatted about his company in numerous friendly emails, suddenly shows his nasty side. "I think it is now my turn to ask the questions," writes Oleg R. – and demands a list by name of all "alleged" journalists who participated in this supposedly "illegal" research. When it comes to the privacy of its own people, xHamster becomes sensitive. It seems that for the first time, the empire feels as exposed as many of its victims.

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website: Youth protectors want to block xHamster